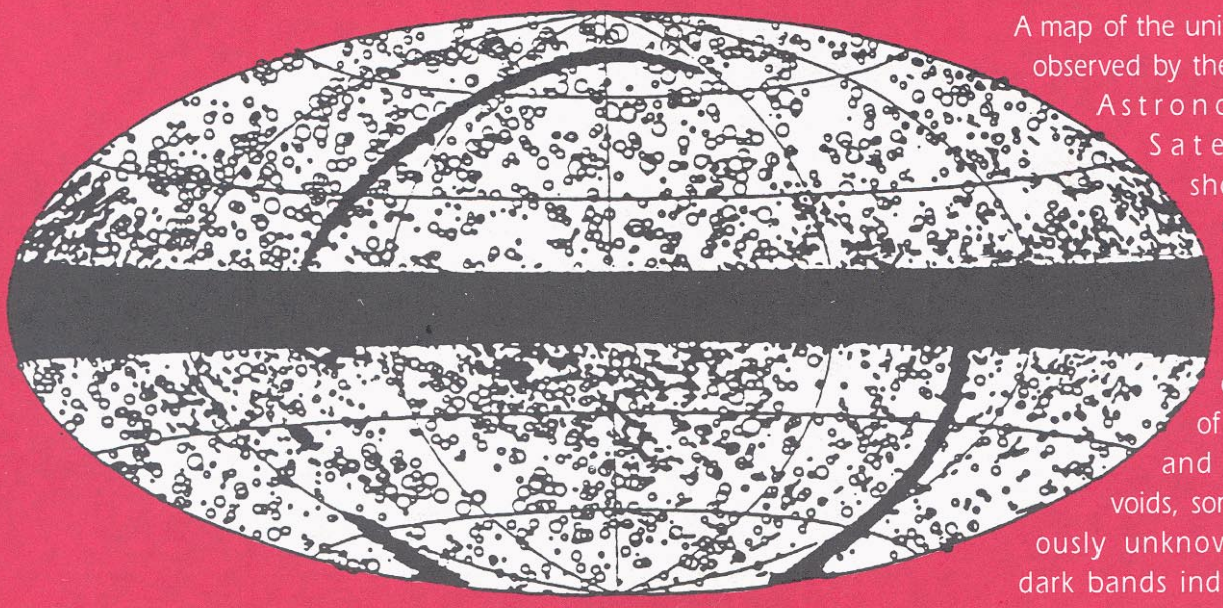
CTR

COMMUNITY TELEVISION REVIEW



A map of the universe, as observed by the Infared Astronomical Satellite, shows the distribution of huge superclusters of galaxies and gaping voids, some previously unknown. The dark bands indicate incomplete satellite coverage or other observational problems. The underlying distribution of density indicates many more large-scale structures in the universe than prevailing theories had predicted.

FUTURE VISIONS

JUNE/JULY 1991
VOLUME 14, NO. 2

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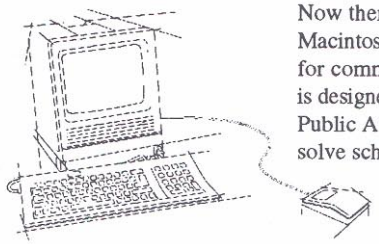
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NON-VOTING MEMBERS: Portland Cable Access, OR • WCTV-Wheaton Community Cable, IL • Multnomah Cable Regulatory Authority, OR • Multnomah Cable Access Corp., OR • Central States Region, NFLCP

CTR

JUNE/JULY 1991
VOLUME 14, NUMBER 2

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Cover graphic courtesy of Nature Magazine

From the Chair: Future Visions

One can rightfully argue that access is one of the few "past" future visions for community communications that has achieved a significant measure of success. For all our struggles and daily effort to maintain facilities and funding, the efforts of the NFLCP and friends have brought PEG access to hundreds of communities and, literally, millions of citizens. Our playing ground, however, is changing. Even as we continue to strengthen access in existing communities and see its growth in renewal agreements, cable television faces changes in technology and competition. We must be ready for those changes, if we are to assure the future of communications based on localism and diversity.

One major step in that direction is the Communications Policy Forum. Co-sponsored by the ACLU and the Consumer Federation of America, this forum is bringing together dozens of public interest and media policy groups to forge a unified consumer telecommunications policy. I was pleased to represent NFLCP at the first meeting of the policy forum, held April 17 in Washington, D.C. Approximately 40 groups were present, representing a wide range of interests. Organizers anticipate the project will run about two years.

We are also pleased to be working with Ralph Nader's new Teledemocracy Project. The project is headed by public interest activist Jeff Chester and is aimed at creating public awareness of the cable-telco debate, including the access policy issues with which we are concerned. Tony Lewis was present at the first press conference, which kicked off the project.

Finally, with this year's National Convention, I will be stepping down after four years as NFLCP Chairperson. It is quite impossible to thank everyone with whom I have been associated, to reminisce about the changes that have taken place or the growth of the organization. This has been the most challenging and meaningful experience in my professional life and I hope to continue service to the organization in other ways. Shalom, chaverim – farewell, my dear friends.

—Sharon Ingraham
Chairperson

Hometown USA Video Festival

Hometown USA Video Festival Announces Nominees

The Hometown USA Video Festival, cable's largest awards program honoring locally produced programs, has completed the preliminary judging of the over 2000 entrants.

Finalists were selected in each of 34 categories by 27 preliminary judging sites across the country. Within each category finalists were selected for volunteer and media professionally produced programs and single and series programs.

The 400 finalists represent 183 cities in 27 states. Local cable programming operations in California garnered the largest number of finalists with a total of 66. The California finalists were produced in 33 cities. Among the states represented with finalists, Massachusetts ranked second with 46 finalists from 26 different cities, and Michigan third with 33 finalists from 18 different cities.

At the local level the Miami Valley Cable TV Council garnered the most finalists with 13. Local programming operations with six or more finalists included: Arlington Community TV, Arlington, VA (10); Vision Cable of Pinellas, Clearwater, FL (9); Multnomah Cable Access, Gresham, OR (9); Access Sacramento, Sacramento, CA (7); Rogers Cable 4, Vancouver, B.C. (7); St. Paul Cable Access, St. Paul, MN (6), Montgomery Community Television, Rockville, MD (6); HOM-TV, Okemos, MI (6); Portland Cable Access, Portland, OR (6); and Germantown High School Television, Germantown, TN (6).

Nominees for the four overall excellence categories are as follows:

Overall Excellence Public Access

Access Sacramento - Sacramento, CA
Arlington Community Television - Arlington, VA
Community Access Television - Industry, CA
Portland Cable Access Television - Portland, OR
PrimeCable - Dekalb Center for Community TV - Decatur, GA

Overall Excellence Local Origination

Cablevision of Dearborn - Dearborn, MI
Continental Cablevision of Springfield - Springfield, MA
Irving Community Television Network - Irving, TX
VisionCable of Pinellas, Inc. - Clearwater, FL

Overall Excellence Government Access

City of Lakewood - Lakewood, CA
City of Pittsburgh - Pittsburgh, PA
City of Plano - Plano, TX
City of Sterling Heights - Sterling Heights, MA

Overall Excellence Educational Access

Laredo Independent School District - Laredo, TX
LISP-TV - Lubbock, TX
Multnomah Cable Access - Gresham, OR
Sacramento Educational Cable Consortium - Sacramento, CA

The winners of the 1991 Hometown USA Video Festival will be announced and awards presented on July 25 at the 14th Annual Awards Night ceremony at the Portland Performing Arts Center in conjunction with the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers Annual Convention.

For further information, contact Sue Buske, c/o Hometown USA Video Festival, 3112 "O" Street, Suite 1, Sacramento, CA 95816. Telephone (916) 456-0757 or (916) 456-0776.

New Numbers for Jobline, D.C. Office

Please note the new telephone numbers for the NFLCP national office and Jobline. The new numbers were necessitated by the recent move to new quarters in D.C.

To reach national, call (202) 393-2650.

For access jobs across America, or to post job openings, call (202) 393-2653.

The NFLCP's mailing address remains the same: PO Box 27290, Washington, D.C. 20038.

Three Openings on CTR Editorial Board

Applications are currently being sought for three expiring terms on the Community Television Review Editorial Board.

The seven member board is responsible for selecting annual themes for CTR and assisting in the solicitation of articles. Additionally, one board member is requested to serve as Editor-in-Chief of an issue once a year.

To receive an application, members should contact Information Services Committee Chair Rick Hayes at ACPL Channel 10, 900 Webster St., Fort Wayne, IN 46802, or call (219) 424-7241, ext. 2254.

BBS Reminder!

NFLCP Bulletin Board operator Greg Smith reminds members that anyone with a personal computer and a modem can access the BBS by calling (217) 359-9118 and setting their modem to 300, 1200 or 2400 baud, 8 bits, 1 stop bit, no parity.

The system is designed for members, staff and board to exchange information, discuss issues, or research past activities.

For more information, contact Smith at the NFLCP Bulletin Board, 917 W. Columbia Ave., Champaign, IL 61821, or (217) 352-9655.

Centers Receive Awards

Northwest Community Television of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota captured three first place awards recently in the 1991 Minnesota Community Television Awards. NCT had 12 finalists for awards.

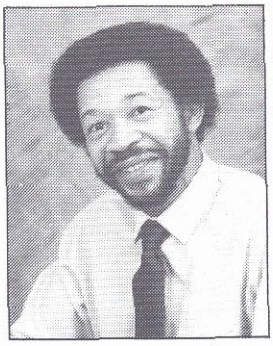
Cambridge Community Television (CCTV) of Cambridge, Massachusetts recently was awarded a $3,000 grant by the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers for the National Endowment for the Humanities.

CCTV also announced the recent installation of satellite up-link and down-link capabilities in cooperation with the Massachusetts Corporation for Educational Telecommunications. CCTV is looking for other access centers with similar capability to research possible projects. To find out more, call them at (617) 225-2500 or write to One Kendall Sq. B-400, Cambridge, MA 02139.

From the Executive Director

T. Andrew Lewis
Executive Director, NFLCP

In mid-May, three weeks after taking office, the Central States Region graciously invited me to address its Grand Rapids, Michigan conference. Just as this is my first opportunity to speak with you through the CTR, that was my first opportunity to personally introduce myself to a large segment of the NFLCP membership. I thought that I would share the essence of those remarks with you here.



T. Andrew Lewis

To all of you — guardians of the first amendment–I extend my greetings.

By now, I'm sure that most of you are aware that the rumors are true. Yes, I admit it–I am an outsider; I'm not from the access arena. But, just how outside am I? Let me share a little about who I am, where I'm coming from and where I'd like to see us go.

I could be described as a nonprofit management generalist, and a strong believer in precise goal identification, careful staffing definition and training, interactive supervision, stringent accountability and proactive resource development and control. However, I can more simply be described as an ardent advocate for social change. I am committed to bridging the enormous chasm between the functional and the disenfranchised which has widened so drastically over the past ten years as to warrant new terminology–*the empowered and the hopeless.*

So what has this social change agenda to do with an organization of cable access advocates? I've said it before, and I'll say it here again–everything. Let me explain. Change requires movement. Movement requires work. Work requires power. Power requires resources.

What resources? Money. [Let's not feel guilty about it. Money is good because we must use it for our cause, and our cause is good.] Knowledge. Knowledge and the knowledge of how to acquire knowledge is key. Human resources–the most fundamental and indispensable resource. [This is each and every one of you–the NFLCP membership and the millions of others throughout the world who support free expression. I propose a rousing ovation to you, the human resource; you certainly deserve it.]

These are all, however, secondary to free expression. A reservoir of resources is useless without a pipeline to the thirsty. It is, for the vast majority of us, only through our individual and collective abilities to freely and effectively exchange information that we can identify and marshall resources, transforming them into power. And it is that power that moves humanity. Whether the objective of that movement is purely artistic expression or societal realignment or any other focus along the spectrum of human endeavor, that movement requires power. And the magnitude, even the very existence of that power is ultimately determined by our ability to send and receive information. Thus, the overarching, unifying resource is access to communications. Perhaps I am not an outsider at all!

Now that you have had a view of who I am and where I'm coming from, let me turn briefly to where I see us going and how we get there. Let's try a futuristic visual here. Imagine millions of Americans, "accessers" they dub themselves, actively engaged in participatory free expression. Their demand for access to community television has made it a media institution. The NFLCP now serves a membership of 50,000, and is known for its strong presence on Capitol Hill, the quantity and quality of its member services and the currency of its publications. And yes, for its sound fiscal base.

How will this vision be accomplished? Management by objective can play a major role over the next few years. Our goal of universal access and participation is our driving force. The routes that we take to achieve it must be objectively scrutinized and selected. Our goal oriented coalitions may be quite different from our philosophical alliances. Similarly, a broadened funding base may mean support from the pecunious who are not among our ideological bedfellows. To seek out and form such new, goal oriented affiliations is consistent with our cause so long as our principles remain inviolate.

Finally, we must communicate with independent producers. While respecting their right to remain aloof, we must fulfill our responsibility to inform them that that right is rooted in the success of our struggle which they should join.

I am, indeed, excited both by the work that lies ahead and by your unflagging commitment. We must keep our communication lines open so that we can share in the future development of the NFLCP and of the access institution.

—T. Andrew Lewis
Executive Director

About This Issue

FUTURE VISIONS

When speaking of *Future Visions* and the impact of the unknown on public access television, history becomes a main tool of projection. In the process of gathering articles for this issue, many discussions surrounding its theme were based on where we've been as a community of media access advocates.

As Editor-In-Chief of the Future Visions issue, I've been thinking a lot about information that is not yet available to us information which may influence the direction of cable access and community television over the next few decades.

Given this, I was struck by an article or the front page of the New York Times dated January 3, 1991. "Astronomers New Data Jolt Vital Part of Big Bang Theory." The article discusses the origin and the evolution of the universe. It seems the Big Bang theory is being seriously challenged (and in some cases discarded), "throwing the field of cosmology into turmoil."

The new data goes on about distribution of density and many more large–scale structures in the universe than prevailing theories had predicted. The cold dark matter theory appears inadequate in explaining activity beyond local clustering while the hot dark matter theory may be revived in the attempt to get around the large structure dilemma.

All this made me stop and think about the history and development of public access as we know it today; distribution, density, local clustering ...and the challenge of growth within our respective communities. In regard to the Big Bang, Dr. Alan Dressler of the Carnegie Institution of Washington was quoted as saying "The one idea that was too good to be true turned out to be too good to be true." Is that public access?

One thing does seem to be true however, which is reflected in this issue of CTR. There is a future for public access and community television. And the idea that was too good is being carefully reviewed in order that it simply continues to get better and better.

I would like to thank those who contributed to this issue for their time and for accepting the challenge of writing about the unknown. I would like to especially thank Dirk Koning for his support and help in putting this issue together.

—Karen Helmerson
Guest Editor-in-Chief

Hit Pause, Then Search: Looking Forward after Twenty Years of Access

Andrew Blau
Vice Chair, NFLCP Board of Directors

Keynote Address, National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, Northeast Mid-Atlantic Bi-Regional Conference, East Hartford, Connecticut, April 20, 1991

Access has grown more vigorously than even many of its supporters sometimes recognize. Less than twenty years after the first American access cablecast in July, 1971, access channels are in about 2,000 communities making an estimated 15,000 hours per week of original programming available. That's more than ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS produce in a year combined. If the skeptics are to be believed, as much as $200 million went to support access channels in 1989, a tiny fraction of the cost of network programming.

Twenty years may sound like a long time when we think of our efforts so far, but not if we consider that many things that today we take for granted were still considered "new ideas" after that period. As a recent newspaper column about personal computers noted:

> **the great payoff has not materialized and, if history is a guide, which it usually is, the payoff will probably not appear until the 21st century. The railroad, the electric motor and the car were similarly anemic when they were in their youths. Ingrained national habits had to change...and in each case that took a generation or more to achieve.**

That's something that many of us who work with access every day are often too close to see: access challenges some deeply ingrained national habits about television, and changing them will take time. Twenty years is normally just the first phase.

Moreover, the movement for access has achieved as much as it has during a period when communications technology, communications policy and the First Amendment itself have been entirely reoriented. As we look forward in the wake of these changes, it is crucial that we clarify or focus what we do. If not, we run the risk that ten or twenty years from now, in a world of fiber optics, direct broadcast satellites and video from the phone company, public access may have been reduced to little more than a tolerated relic of an earlier, more idealistic age, if it hasn't been squeezed out as irrelevant or wasteful.

Surveying the Electronic Frontier. Since 1971, when access first appeared, communication through electronic media has been transformed by the fax machine, the connection between the computer and the telephone, fundamental changes in the telephone network, cellular telephones and other technology. We can now communicate among ourselves in many new ways: conference calls, video conferencing, computer bulletin boards, voice mail, broadcast-fax, and others that are turning individual media, like the telephone, into a mass medium, while pay-per-view options and VCRs are turning the mass media into more of an individualized medium.

But the one constant is that freedom of speech is never won easily in new media. Access advocates are not alone in facing what feels like an uphill battle to secure the right to freely communicate electronically. Consider:

- Prodigy, an interactive computer information service operated by Sears and IBM and supported by advertisers, set rules against using the Prodigy system for certain purposes, including discussing the rates it charged for its services or contacting the system's advertisers about anything other than their products. When some subscribers wanted to discuss a rate hike, they had their accounts cancelled and they were removed from the system.
- Dialog Information Services, which provides on-line access to information, including Dun & Bradstreet's Financial Records database of information about 700,000 U.S. corporations, refused to allow a number of unions to get access to D&B's information.
- Local telephone companies, which have always carried all traffic regardless of content, are now hoping to keep controversial messages off their "970" and "540" lines in order to protect their business reputations, while Sprint, AT&T and MCI screen messages for their "900" services. (Sprint is said to reject 40% of its applicants.)
- Tom Metzger, whose racist program "Race and Reason" has been on access channels in many communities has also been using Voice Mail. The White Aryan Resistance (WAR) Hot Line had been operating in perhaps 15 cities for as long as 5 years when the operator of the Voice Mail system shut down the WAR phones due to protests.
- The Secret Service shut down dozens of electronic bulletin boards and executed a nationwide dragnet against computer "hackers" with chilling results. A college student was put on trial by the U.S. government for interstate transport of stolen property for something he transmitted in his electronic newsletter. (The case was dropped when it became clear that the "stolen" document was generally available for under $13.) Employees of a computer games manufacturer came to work one day to find that the Secret Service had seized their offices, ransacked their files, and confiscated their computers, disks, monitors, even their laser printers, seeking information. The company was never charged with anything, but had to lay off half its employees because of the losses it sustained. Another hacker came home to find the Secret Service had entered his home, guns drawn, and confiscated his computer, books, telephone answering machine, "boom box," and all his cassette tapes. No charge was ever filed. In fact, ten months after the Secret Service shut down the bulletin boards, the government has not issued any indictments.

This level of pressure was generated because of fears about individual speech that was transmitted electronically. (The same speech would be legal if it were in print.) Clearly, the issues we face in the access community are shared in a variety of new media. Our struggles and our potential allies may be more widespread than we often imagine.

On Hallowed Ground. At the same time the technology has been changing, the role of communication policy has changed substantially. When Congress created the Federal Communications Commission in 1934, it directed the agency to regulate broadcasting in the "public interest." The FCC and the courts evolved a broad framework through which communication policy was linked to other social needs and interests.

Beginning in the late 1970s, that orientation began to change: the "public interest" was turned into "what interests the public," as deregulation equated sound policy with simple popularity. By the mid-80's, the FCC Chair claimed that the television was "a toaster with pictures," an appliance like any other. As a result, the regulatory framework in which access channels were created and originally supported has evaporated.

The First Amendment itself has also been recast in recent years. Monroe Price, a longtime observer of cable law and policy, reflected recently on "the uses and abuses of the first amendment." In a provocative, short essay, Price wrote:

> **[S]omething is wrong, very wrong, with the current debate over telecommunications policy. The first amendment, so central to our culture, is being wheeled out not to nourish full and open debate, but as a decisive force in structuring the communications industry.**
>
> * * *
>
> **The victory of Tom Paine is being corporatized...I fear that in the new first amendment order, the real Paines of the world may be ill-served. The soapbox is being replaced by the mall. We may be creating a plastic freedom in which the logic of the first amendment becomes the enemy of the realization of a multitude of speech. ...We become flooded with images, but poorer in public debate.**

As a result, Price concludes, our government, and by extension our society, can no longer build a communications policy that

magnifies the possibility of speech. Everything is now a First Amendment "speaker," and any effort to craft sound policy by balancing competing interests appears to abridge someone's Constitutional rights. That, of course, paralyzes the policy making process. The only active spot seems to be the courts. As a result, wealthy litigants, who can afford the best legal services and can maintain these commitments for years, may well end up winning their claims to constitutional protection over their poorly financed, overextended opponents.

What About Access? If the First Amendment has been corporatized, communications policy has become a simple economic policy, and technology has made electronic communication widely available, what are the implications for those of us committed to providing and expanding public access? I believe it means returning to the fundamental question, What do access centers do? We often speak generally of the First Amendment and our First Amendment "mission," but I think that misses the point and can sometimes blind us to our real mission. Stripped to the essentials, access centers are education and communication centers in community settings. The service is not upholding the First Amendment. The First Amendment is the foundation upon which we build our efforts.

The relationship that religious groups have with the First Amendment is instructive. Religious groups are also protected by the First Amendment, which begins "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...." While this "free exercise" protection is as dear to every religious institution as free speech protection is to every access center, the First Amendment is not the goal of any church or synagogue. If threatened, they will fight tenaciously to maintain their First Amendment rights, but they know their real goals lie elsewhere. Their right to freely pursue those goals is the gift of the First Amendment. Analogously, the goals for access centers lie elsewhere than the First Amendment itself: to educate and provide people with tools to use a modern communications medium to meet their own communication needs, as they define them.

In this context, "education" means more than just the basics of video production. Access centers should provide an education in the means to participate in today's most influential information medium. When access first developed in the early 1970s, the aim was to give people access to the equipment so that they could speak for themselves. Many believed that access to equipment would promote change for the better. But, according to some estimates, there are now over 70 million camcorders in the U.S. The opportunity to express oneself electronically has not led to widespread social change, at least not yet, even if one man with a camcorder can turn an entire nation's attention to police brutality. Obviously getting people's hands on the equipment is not enough by itself. Centers that provide opportunities for producers to develop their communication skills; for viewers to consider and think critically about the medium; for artists to develop and realize their ideas in video; and for all community members to develop access to the medium in whatever manner they choose are moving in the right, which is to say comprehensive, direction.

Similarly, if we consider access centers as communication centers, that is, places where people can make use of a technology for local communication needs, we will develop a far broader and more comprehensive definition than simply a place to make "television." Consider the model of the telephone. While it is certainly a sales tool, an important feature of the economic infrastructure, and a source of information and entertainment, we have no problem recognizing its role as a personal communication tool, where we determine the content and the quality of the message and the recipient chooses to listen or do something else. Video distributed by wire ought to have a similar diversity of uses. Access centers are the principal areas where the public can develop those possibilities and free video communication from the narrow constraints of television production, just as legions of independent computer programmers developed uses for the PC that freed the computer from being only a tool for big business, the government and the military.

When we conceive of access centers in that context, I believe it shows that access is way ahead of its time, not a marginal adjunct to "real TV." Access centers shift the balance of power from mass to media; they provide the possibility for and should encourage new uses for video as a communications medium. Access uses the trappings of television distributed by cable (a mass medium configured to entertain people and deliver viewers to advertisers) in a nonmass way. Some people call that "narrowcasting," but that word's inescapable relationship to broadcast suggests that "point-to-multipoint" might be more accurate (if less elegant), reflecting the individuality of the recipients as well as the sender and invoking telecommunications models instead of TV.

If we reconceptualize access centers as places where we teach people how video can be a communication tool, then access centers become the seedbed of the future when people can send video to others over a network for any variety of purposes. Access centers become the birthplace of the "video dial tone" that some communications policy makers have been promoting: an open line to every cabled home that people can fill on a non-discriminatory basis with the programming of their choice.

In a different vein, leaders in the computer industry are developing multimedia PCs, promising that "desk top" video will join text, data and voice first in business communication and assuredly in personal communication as well. A headline on the front page of a recent industry newsletter announced that a breakthrough in computer chips "brings full-motion video processing to desktops: Low-cost peripherals promise explosion in office and home uses." The chip, which will go into mass production later this year, can integrate digital motion video, special effects, stills, audio, graphics and text in multimedia applications. It can be programmed to permit superimposing text over images, scaling of video into windows and video effects such as zoom, scan, merge and fade. The chip's manufacturer predicts that by 1995, "software applications incorporating digital video will take the place of character-only software on most desktop PCs." There's one catch, though: where will the video come from? While a stock catalogue of video images may be made available, that would limit the multi-media capacity to mere illustration. It would be like having a desktop publishing program that was limited to a stock catalogue of texts. Without a source of video that can meet the particular communication needs of each document, multi-media PCs on everyone's desk seem far less exciting. In fact, access centers are the forerunners of video used by non-specialists to communicate, not just record. As video distinct from "television" becomes more pervasive, as the growth in camcorders and multimedia computing suggests it will, access centers will come into their own as the fertile crescent of this brave new world.

So, after twenty years of access, where are we? Perhaps we are ahead of the telecommunications industry and ahead of the policy makers. Perhaps access centers are the laboratories where the future of electronic communications is being developed by tens of thousands of unpaid researchers. And wouldn't that be the ultimate irony? If, after years of titanic battles among the industry giants, and between them and Congress (creating a "Godzilla vs. King Kong" atmosphere where the access community often seems to play the part of the citizens of Tokyo), the prize will be to do what access centers have been doing all along. But the access movement will be able to stake its claim only if access providers move decisively in the years ahead to focus on what makes access centers distinct and valuable as the tools to make and distribute video become commonplace. ■

Marginal Notes: Consumer Video, the First Amendment and the Future of Access

Robert H. Devine
Antioch College

Presented at The 1990 National Convention of The National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, July 26, 1990, Washington, D.C. Revised for CTR - 1/20/91

Introduction. The notion of public access to cable communication derives from a utilitarian interpretation of the constitutional guarantees of the First Amendment and is bolstered by public policy which has, since the late 1940s, favored localism in broadcasting, and is driven by a technology (small-format video) which allows non-professionals to participate effectively in public discourse. Providing the platform and means for ordinary citizens to "speak" and disseminate their messages via cable so that they may be "heard" as well, is grounded in the concept of a "marketplace of ideas" as the strength of a democracy. The social invention of cable seized the opportunity to protect the rights of citizen access to the marketplace and to implement public policy with regard to localism. In an era of high-tech electronic communications in which the ownership of the tools of production has become increasingly concentrated through both vertical and horizontal consolidation, cable planners and policymakers reserved a place for the "multitude of voices" in the arena of electronic public discourse.

Although in-depth attention has been given to the legal and regulatory framework necessary to protect this unique access to the electronic marketplace, scarce attention has been given to the functions and assumptions of the marketplace itself and to the position of access within that marketplace. While outreach efforts have aimed at giving the disenfranchised a voice and lending salience to the problems and issues which confront them, public access has been only marginal in setting a public agenda. The increasing institutionalization of access delivery, particularly in the larger urban centers, has often favored professionalism, political safety, financial security, and the preservation of the system itself over and above the creation of a vital and diverse marketplace of ideas. While access facilitation systems have been designed to lower thresholds, thereby allowing the broadest possible participation, a healthy diversity is not as much in evidence as it might be, and in many cases those who might most benefit from accessibility to this arena of public discourse are the least likely to avail themselves of that opportunity. Progress in achieving the ideal has been slow in coming; as yet we have not consistently nurtured *effective* speech, created a literature of the people or developed a local approach to analysis. In spite of vigorous efforts on the part of access providers to democratize electronic communications, the "marketplace" of ideas remains essentially limited and skewed toward professional commercial speakers.

In addition, the proliferation of home video in recent years has contributed to a general de-legitimization of access as valid public discourse. The identification of small-format video production with de-skilling (*anyone* can do it, hence it can't be formal or legitimate "speech"), aesthetic impoverishment (amateur and home videos are notorious for unstable camera shots, poor technical quality, and general tedium), marginal activity (birthdays, picnics, vacations, etc.), and attraction to spectacle ("Funniest Home Videos") shapes and molds public perceptions regarding the entry of non-professional speakers into the "marketplace."

The Marketplace. Cast within the framework of the constitutional guarantees of the First Amendment, the idea of a free marketplace of ideas appeals to our democratic sense of individual freedom and autonomy. Speech is unfettered by government intervention or control, and citizens are provided "...an arena within which ideas of all groups could be freely communicated and would be free to compete for acceptance." (Ginsberg, 1986:37) but while this interpretation emphasizes the absence of governmental control, it fails to acknowledge other factors which act to restrict freedom of belief, expression and assembly (Jhally, 1989:65). In fact, control of the institutions, resources and functions of the marketplace is concentrated in very few hands, with the result that the "freedom of access" to that marketplace is associated with power and privilege.

Diversity is an essential premise of a competitive free marketplace. If ideas are to compete for our attention and allegiance there must be a multitude of voices and a wide spectrum of ideas available. A healthy marketplace should include a diversity of language, culture and ethnicity, a variety of social, economic and political viewpoints and a wide range of formats and representational systems (Shaw, 1989:10). The requirements of capital, expertise and organization, however, critically limit the number and diversity of voices permitted in the marketplace while newer technologies such as cable and the VCR have substantially increased the *array* of commodity units available, the absolute number of *sources* has in fact diminished. The user is confined to the arena of consumer choices; messages, in turn, take on the characteristics of commodities.

The unfortunate realities are **(a)** the voices in the marketplace are there by virtue of their ability to "...deploy the financial, institutional, and organizational resources needed to 'market' ideas effectively" (Ginsberg, 1986:37); **(b)** the information competencies necessary for entry into the marketplace correlate with a speaker's socioeconomic position" (Gandy,1986:108); **(c)** the distinction between producers (few) and consumers (many) "is artificially reinforced by economic and administrative measures" (Enzensberger, 1986:105); and, **(d)** a very limited number of speakers sets an agenda for public discourse that involves only a selective representation of the world (Good, 1989:57). The "sound" ideas that emerge from the competition of the marketplace, Ginsberg notes, are those that are better financed than others (Ginsberg, 1986:40).

Democratic participation in the marketplace turns out to be characterized by limited access, constrained choice, controlled competition and a narrow spectrum of opinion and ideas. Benjamin Ginsberg suggests that construction of the marketplace and the enfranchisement of popular opinion were motivated by the need to legitimate the economic domination by an elite and maintain the balance of power.

> **The 'marketplace of ideas,' built during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, effectively disseminates the beliefs and ideas of the upper classes while subverting the ideological and cultural independence of the lower classes. Through the construction of this marketplace, western governments forged firm and enduring links between socioeconomic position and ideological power, permitting upper classes to use each to buttress the other (Ginsberg, 1986:86-87).**

Leslie Good goes a step further in asserting that the pluralist reading of the marketplace idea intentionally mystifies and conceals the nature and operation of power in social relationships.

> **Put briefly, the pluralist thesis of power says that power is a diffuse and empirically verifiable outcome of healthy conflict among competing interest groups, usually manifested as individual consumer-like decisions; and even though based on 'conflict,' power-as-pluralism works for the common good,' integrating us into our social environment, ultimately producing social stability by easing social tensions. In the absence of overt conflict, consensus reigns in a state of equilibrium, and 'power' becomes irrelevant. Power simply exercises itself out of business (Good, 1989:51).**

In the pluralist reading, decision making is open and observable, a knowledgeable public makes informed choices regarding relations of

power, and a plural marketplace operates to insure social stability. In a more critical reading, however, the marketplace functions to obscure and maintain the origins and relations of power and the hegemony of values.

The marketplace, in effect, secures a "centrist," or neutral position between the poles of opinion, packages and distributes the middleground position as a logical and desirable outcome of healthy marketplace competition, and promotes the overall stability of the system itself. The marketplace serves the hegemony well by minimizing disorder and maintaining equilibrium. It sets the agenda of the "common good" and limits the parameters within which choice or dialogue are possible, while at the same time co-opting the fringes of dissent. Media are a key element in the ensemble of relations that Enzensberger labels "the consciousness industry" (Enzensberger, 1974:10) and play a major role in obtaining consent for the hegemony (Good, 1989:62). Dominance is not secured through the coercion of soldiers, judges, police and the collectors, but by a kind of consent which appears to derive from choice.

Ginsberg suggests that, historically, the enfranchisement of opinion, voice, and suffrage comes at times **(a)** when there are internal challenges to power, to balance interclass conflict, **(b)** when there is broad social disorder, to stabilize such, **(c)** when there is an external threat, to unify and pave the way for increased taxes, and **(d)** when there is a need to centralize national authority, as in nation-building (Ginsberg, 1986:11-12). Public access was born in the late 1960's and early 1970's. One might speculate that the civil rights struggles and concomitant disorder, the widespread resistance to an unthinkable war, the pronounced political, racial, economic and moral divisions in the nation and the general crisis of legitimacy were contributing factors. In this light, the development and sanctioning of public access could be seen as an attempt to co-opt the fringes of the disaffected, to consolidate the hegemony and to diminish disorder.

Still, this expansion of enfranchisement vis a vis the marketplace of ideas carried with it much of the baggage of the existing mass media structures. The source of messages was still often a "professional" charged with speaking *for* a community of interest. The message was still, by and large, a "program" or a commodity with spectacle and exchange value. The channel was still private property - the root of the First Amendment struggle on the part of cable operators. The audience was still confined to the role of a passive consumer. And finally, there persisted that rigidly enforced balance between producers and consumers of messages that is inscribed in the commodity/audience matrix.

As noted, the protections of the marketplace were clearly for the producers and promoters of ideas, rather than for the consumers. It was never intended that the privilege of entering into the mainstream discourse of a community and the concomitant protections of that role be extended, as it was with public access, to the broad masses. The democratic possibilities for effective dissent, resistance, opposition and cultural expression, as with community broadcasting, the alternative press and independent production, were viewed as dangerous to the system and were intended to remain at the margins of the marketplace.

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Consumer Video Technology. In discussing video recording technology, it's important to make three distinctions:

- **First,** it is essential to differentiate *production* (video-taping, generating, authoring) from *distribution and exhibition* (home copying, playback, cable, etc.). The home VCR is most often conceptualized as a "read-only" device, and the vast majority of use draws upon and is dependent upon the recording, purchase and rental of mass distributed materials. Nielsen's 1984 VCR Usage Tracking Survey revealed that 12% of VCR households owned a video camera, but that 65% of the cameras saw use only once-a-month to once-every-four months (Nmungwun, 1989:204). The implications are astonishing. One might imagine a xerox machine in the absence of pencil, pen, typewriter or any understanding of the authoring mode. While consumer control (over time, place, content and manner of consumption) and interaction (structuring, shifting, sequencing, searching, etc.) are central themes of VCR use, these qualities are applied in the service of commodity distribution rather than culture production. Literacy has two complementary modes - reading and writing. In the case of television (by analogy) many "read", few "read" well and fewer still are able to "write." While the VCR user exercises control of the sequence, rate and timing of messages, the activity is still inherently passive in confining the "reader" to the audience role. Writing involves creation, intention, construction and expression. The act of writing informs critical reading; the writer learns to use language, to think critically, to evaluate, to interrogate, to analyze and to develop oppositional or resistant readings. Writing literacy encourages counterfactual thinking - one can conceptualize about how things are not or how they might be different. Writing, like oration, allows participation in the discourse of a culture. In the case of video, however, the thresholds of writing have been limited by cost, tool accessibility and expertise, with the result that the emphasis has remained on the production of programs by a professional producer, for an audience.
- **Second,** it is helpful to make a distinction between the *interaction* and the *distribution* modes of communication. The focus of much of the attention given to home video has been on the manner in which the VCR constructed new audiences, on the role of the VCR as a new venue and distribution system for preproduced programs, and on the impact of home video on other program distribution systems - cable, film, television and advertising (Massey, 1989:9-10). The essence of communication involves "reciprocal action between transmitter and receiver" (Enzensberger, 1986:98), as opposed to passive reception of distributed commodities.
- **Third,** it will also be helpful to differentiate culture as a *practice* from culture as a *commodity*. Mass cultural commodities do not usually reflect the shared perceptions, practices and understandings of a specific community or people. They are not produced by genuine demands, they do not generally challenge consumers to think or reflect, and their driving force is the production of profits (Jhally, 1989:71-72). There were, as of mid-1989, 70 million camcorders in circulation in the U.S. In spite of this remarkable proliferation of productive machinery with the potential to create a rich diversity of messages, interactions and cultural practices, we (here I include public access) are still bound to the reification processes that transform *communication* into *programs* and *audiences*.

One need only inventory the distinctive features of the portable video recording medium to assess the possibilities. It is relatively easy to use and does not require particular language or print literacy skills, and so can be used by a wide range of communicators. It is portable and so can travel to locations where culture is practiced and occupy the interior of the situation in which it is used (Devine, 1974:4). It allows for immediate playback/review and so gives subjects a measure of control and opens possibilities for feedback and analysis. It records reality with a great deal of fidelity and so can serve as an accurate memory of cultural practice. Tape is reusable and can be easily duplicated, allowing recorded

materials to circulate meaning and be shared among wider networks. It allows for editing, altering and resequencing, permitting counterfactual constructions or representations. It can exist entirely outside of governmental control, censorship or intervention. And, it can be productive apart from the realm of commodification (exchange value) and the demands of the marketplace (implying audience), in the service of human interaction (use value).

Unfortunately, no one is systematically training people to use video as a cultural practice, as a means for critique, for developing "local vernaculars of analysis" (Luke, 1989:248-249), or as a vehicle for creating and sustaining oppositional culture. Colleges, universities and access centers are still training people to make television programs, to attract audiences and to replicate industry forms, modes, standards and practices. The emphasis is on expertise and technique, the narrative structures of conflict and resolution, spectacle and entertainment value, and the attraction of audience as a measure of success.

Programming efforts tend to move in two directions, both mirroring and reinforcing the distinction between professional culture producers and culture consumers. On the one hand a "program" can aspire to and attain the status of a commodity and be circulated for its exchange value (money, prestige, recognition) in the formal channels of culture distribution. The cultural practice involved in such a productive effort is thus co-opted and commodified. In such cases, Luke suggests, the danger for alternative media is that it "might simply devolve into eco-activist soap operas, feminist quiz shows, socialist sitcoms, or no-nukes talk shows" (Luke, 1989: 256). On the other hand, the "program" can be marginalized and trivialized as aesthetically poor (lacking the requisite professional production values), aberrant, or amateur.

Two models have been advanced to instruct consumer video users in the cultural practices appropriate for entry into the marketplace; both focus on the commodity value of spectacle. First, local and national news stations have begun the practice of encouraging "news-hounds" to submit footage of breaking news as it happens. The co-optation of 70 million stringers clearly extends the reach of the major players in the marketplace. Further, it instructs the video practitioner in the proper use of the technology — it favors fires, accidents, drownings and spectacles with exchange value. On the darker side of this model is the lingering notion that we are a culture that now watches one another; the coercion of external surveillance has been transformed to the consent of internal surveillance. Second, the overwhelming success of national and local "funniest home video" programs, has provided another model for the 70 million video practitioners. Video practice is best suited to recording family members walking into walls, falling off horses or otherwise relinquishing their dignity for its spectacle value. Neither model admits of intentional expression, analysis or serious culture production. Both models domesticate the potential productive capacity of 70 million camcorders and turn that capacity toward sustaining the existing balances of the marketplace.

The rapid diffusion of video technology during the past decade has *not* been matched by a proliferation of speech or culture production. Rather, it has served to extend, amplify and consolidate the existing networks of commodity distribution, while at the same time reinforcing the distinctions between producers and consumers of culture so essential to the economic health of the mass media and culture industries. In addition, the authoring capability of the new technologies has been identified and modelled as marginal. In spite of the redistribution of the means of production, the marketplace of ideas continues to be dominated by those with the most resources, and those with the most to gain from the continuing stability of the marketplace system.

Public Access. Several "myths" have attached themselves to the practice of public access, and these misperceptions serve to locate, define and structure access activity as well as shaping public attitudes regarding access. A primary misperception is that access is about television. Its cameras, recorders and means of distribution certainly seem to indicate a primary mission of making television. The truth is that access is about speech and has more to do with community, cultural and economic development than it does with television. The implications are that careful attention must be given to the manner in which access is situated, characterized and presented. Its activities, structures, policies, operations and goals are not directly comparable to those of television production and broadcasting. In addition, the development and nurturing of speech requires more emphasis on training and outreach than it does on TV, and this has implications for the qualifications, background and orientation of access providers.

A related misperception is that access is about programming. After all, access users produce "shows," access centers schedule programs, and cable channels exhibit a lineup of discrete program units. The protections of access, however, are for the speaker rather than the audience. Programming for an audience (mindful of their needs or interests, or, solicitous of their attention) is secondary to securing and preserving accessibility for all speakers. Access is more grounded in communication and interaction than it is in programs and audiences. Peripheral to this set of attitudes is the often repeated criticism that access is not "cost effective." In terms of programs and the commodity market, this criticism may be valid. This leads access providers in the direction of equating productivity and success with the volume, predictability and "quality" of programming *for* the community and directing resources toward those ends, rather than toward issues of the availability, diversity and vitality of speech *by* the community. Then the productivity of access, however, is seen as increased accessibility for speakers to the marketplace of ideas, and when the costs of providing access are compared to those engendered by voting or jury trials, the extent of the misperception becomes obvious.

These "myths" help to situate access at the periphery. They define a mission which is unattainable; most speakers are not able to produce commodities that can compete with or be measured by the standards of the mass media. They channel resources away from the development of critical skills of articulation and analysis, and in the process, they trivialize much of the speech that is at the core of the access mission.

In both the popular and the industry press, a recurrent characterization of access participants has been that of "hobbyists." Access centers often serve as a place to congregate, socialize, and undertake constructive leisure activity in a community context. This is a positive community dimension of access, but both the image and reality of hobbyist involvement tend to have a marginalizing impact on access. In terms of the image of access as a leisure time hobby, the endeavor assumes the trivial stature of time passing. Access is seen as unimportant, and certainly unessential. Access centers are seen as providing structured activities for seniors, teens and video enthusiasts, but the perception is that such activity should only be supported commensurate with, and in competition with other municipal hobby programs, and should probably be self-supporting. The First Amendment dimension is lost; one might imagine trying to raise community activity funds in order to secure a fair trial. With both the hobbyist image and the hobbyist reality, the speech resultant is all too easily seen as "vanity video" rather than representative voices, and the process is seen as leisure activity rather than fundamental democratic involvement in the civic life of the community.

One of the motivations for involvement in access is the possibility of using the opportunity as a stepping stone on the path toward becoming a professional producer. Access is seen has having the goal of producing "programming" and success involves attracting audience and press attention. Ultimately, success involves gaining remuneration and/or professional status in exchange for access in-

volvement – some kind of "payback" for the long hours. The participation is not viewed as a self-motivated act of *expression* but as a pre-professional activity that *should be* rewarded eventually. The outcomes of this type of involvement are easy to predict and have been evidenced in producers' strikes, series gridlock and the frequent remuneration issues encountered in every urban access operation. Access interactions begin to be shaded by considerations of exchange value, and the system focuses on the protections of audience rather than the protections for the speaker. The pool of hard core producers narrows, and the broad spectrum of grass roots involvement is lost. The result is a mini-PBS operation which does not have the resources of that which it emulates, struggles constantly with producers, and loses broad community support. Access ends up programming *for* the community from a very marginal position.

Popular press treatments have served to locate access at the margins in several ways. First and foremost, national news coverage has selectively focused on controversy and aberration. The Klan, bare bottoms, sacrilegious programing and oddballs receive national attention for their value as spectacles, but are rarely contextualized as protected speech or given background, follow-up or analysis. Second, mass media trivializes, disparages and stereotypes access for comic effect. David Letterman makes frequent access jokes, Saturday Night Live's "Wayne's World" regularly lampoons the activity, comic strips skewer the pretensions of political speech and vanity video, and several sitcoms have done biting satires of the world of access. In a recent CableVision, two producers writing about their trials and tribulations "in search of fame and fortune," characterize access as follows:

> **For the uninitiated, public access is a bizzaro universe inhabited by harebrained politicos, pseudo-psychics, and other loons who, 20 years ago, would probably have been holding court in your local bus terminal. Now, with the advent of advanced cable communications, you can enjoy the musings of these miscreants and malcontents from the comfort of your living room sofa (Manzi, Brugnoli, 1990:55).**

The portrayal of speakers as bizarre crackpots, and the satirization of the speech as mad ravings are characterizations that work to undermine the credibility of a class of speakers and speech, and to locate such discourse at the margins of the marketplace of ideas.

The proliferation of home VCRs represents another potentially marginalizing influence for access. The technology has not produced a significant body of vernacular literature, social or political analysis or unique representations. It *has* produced reproductions of vacations, weddings, barbecues and rites of passage. While such tapes have a cultural integrity of their own, the crossover of unfocused hobbyist, vacationist and private expression recordings into access has the effect of diluting the perception of intentional speech. The unspeakable long term threat of the camcorder is that the proliferation of speakers destabilizes the marketplace entirely. If everyone speaks, who will listen?

In an article on a successful team of access producers in Milwaukee a reporter recounted the struggle of long hours and shoestring resources and then posed the question, "So why bother to do it in the first place?" (Perso, 1989:4). The question is a good one. In a corporate culture that emphasizes programming, the answer involves the exchange-value of program commodities. Program units may be exchanged for the satisfaction derived, for the eventual remuneration possible, for the measure of productivity, or for a return on the investment in the capital plant. In a corporate culture that emphasizes "speech" rather than programming, the answer involves the use-value of speech. The right to speak effectively and to be heard is essential for a democratic society, the exercise of that right is akin to the exercise of the right to vote, and such rights should be protected for all citizens, regardless of the merits of what they have to say.

A primary misperception is that access is about television. ...The truth is that access is about speech and has more to do with community, cultural and economic development than it does with television.

Among those new to the profession of access delivery, there is often a fundamental lack of understanding regarding the mission and situation of access. It's a job, like any job in the television industry, and the passion, dedication, zeal and philosophical commitment required by this particular service profession are nowhere to be found in the job description. More experienced access providers tend to forget the simple structural elegance of the access idea – the redistribution of the means of production – and with it, the inspiring promise of a full, vital and viable marketplace of ideas. These were the ideas which won adherents and allegiance in the first place, and while change has not happened overnight, these ideas should continue to inform our practices. Still, the future of access resides in our ability to achieve broad and critical writing literacy, to tie access firmly to the social organization of its home community, to maintain low and accessible thresholds for entry into the marketplace of ideas, and to have some clarity of vision regarding that marketplace, the central location and mission of access within it, and our situation in the broader cultural hegemony. ■

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Toward a World Federation of Local Television

Karen Helmerson
Chair, International Committee, NFLCP

The international meeting at Charlevoix, Quebec, in October of 1990, provided an opportunity for exchange between professionals in community television from several countries bordering the Atlantic rim. It was also a celebration of the twentieth anniversary of community television in Normandin in the Lac Sainte Jean area. The purpose at Charlevoix was to "have a chance to look at the origin and development of local community TV stations in the world and define new ways at the dawn of a new century".

The Government of Canada, and the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney, prime minister, supported the conference through the Cultural Initiative Program of the Department of Communications in conjunction with Bell Canada, RTCL, Gouvernement du Quebec, Emploi et Immigration Canada, Canon, Tele Cable Charlevoix and Commissariat General aux Relations Internationales de Ia Communaute Francais de Belgique.

The NFLCP was among an international group of fourteen community television organizations officially invited to participate in the meeting. Threaded between workshops on


GOODWIN

Prime Minister Mulroney addresses Charlevoix conference.

funding, collaborations and the origin of local TV, these same fourteen organizations met and approved a resolution to "investigate" the possibility of forming an International Federation of Local and Community TV.

Talk of such a federation had been circulating among the various groups for a few years. Conceivably, an international federation could provide several things; a unified voice, country to country, in promoting the importance of public access to communication technology; collective and knowledgeable influence in the development of communication policies; and (potentially) a supportive administration in the exchange of people and information regarding local culture and the use of video world-wide.

Issues surrounding the formation of such a federation are charged with the intensity of personal and political agendas which reflect the tremendous diversity of needs and interests (not to mention languages) within the local television community internationally. Two primary issues were clearly identified during the limited enrollment workshop, "International Collaborations", as being crucial to the success of such a federation. The issue of representation came forward as a critical element in defining membership in a world federation. And, the very meaning of the word community as in the "International Federation of Local and Community TVs" becomes a pivotal point in describing the cultural and economic environment within which organizations and individuals must work to support the activity of community media production.

What is Community Television? Is it truly the same concept in all countries? Is public access the same thing as community access? In order to establish an international federation, many issues must first be addressed. To do so, a recommendation was approved by the majority of delegates attending the workshop. Following is the actual recommendation that was written during the conference at Charlevoix and delivered at the closing luncheon. ■

International Collaborations Study Commissioned

Recommendation approved by the Majority of Delegates to the Workshop on International Collaborations during the International Meeting of Local and Community TV in Charlevoix, Québec.

The following organizations and countries: RTCL (Regroupement des télévisions communautaires et locales du Québec); APTQ (Association des programmateurs de Ia téléistribution du Québec); NFLCP (National Federation of Local Cable Programmers), United States; **Louisiane,** United States; **Vidéos des Pays,** France; **Videotrame,** Belgium; **Federatie van Lokale en Regionale Televisiestations**, Belgium; **Federation de les Televisions Locals a Catalunya**, Spain; **Associatio Brasileira de Video Popular**, Brazil; OLON (Organisatie van Lokale Omroepen in Nederlands), Netherlands; **Association of Black Film and Video Workshops**, England; **Cree Council of the Mistassini Band**, Quebec James Bay Cree Communications Society, Québec; PICS (Project for International Communication Studies) University of Iowa, United States, were represented at the working meeting on "International Collaborations" during the International Meeting of Local and Community TV in Charlevoix, in October, 1990. They propose the following:

We suggest that the time has come to investigate the possibility of forming an international organization of community video and television entities.

To this end we recommend the following:

1. That a study commission of four or five members be appointed immediately:

2. That this study commission be coordinated by our hosts, RTCL;

3. That this study commission develop, through broad concertation with all concerned parties including third-world groups, a full proposal for an international community video and television organization.

In addition, we mandate the study commission to work on the following directions:

1. Toward maximum openness to various types of community video and television entities;

2. Toward an organization whose members would be already established federations and other groups;

3. Toward a notion of community video and television defined primarly by geographical proximity, while remaining open to cultural, linguistic and other public service communities.

Workshop's animators: ***Rick Altman****, Project for International Communication Studies, (University of Iowa, United States) and* ***Nico van Eijk****, Institute for Information Law, (University of Amsterdam, Nertherlands).*

The enclosed proposal requests a study committee made by four or five persons. After discussions with colleagues, the following persons were recommended to be part of this committee: **Mr. Nico van Eijk**, member of the Board of Directors, OLON, Netherlands; **Ms. Suzy Collard**, Executive Director, Vidéotrame, Communauté française de Belgique; **Mr. Daniel Schlosser**, member of the Board of Directors, "Vidéos des Pays", France; **Ms. Karen Helmerson**, Chairperson of the International Committee, NFLCP.

—Mr. Pierre Bhérer
General Secretary, RTCL, Québec
Pointe-au-Pic, October the 27th, 1990

Note: *To date, the above committee has been developing a system of communication for effective information exchange at all levels to facilitate this study. If you have any interest, comment or questions regarding this proposal, please write Karen Helmerson, c/o Staten Island Community TV, 100 Cable Way, Suite 2, Staten Island, NY 10303.* ■

Community Media in 2016: A Meeting of Minds

Through the miracle (it still amazes me) of live, interactive, multi-point-to-point communication from coast to coast (teleconference call) the following folks spent a liberating 90 minutes thinking about the next 25 years of community media.

Included in the call were Steve Pierce, Executive Director, Deep Dish Network; Lynn Chadwick, President and CEO, National Federation of Community Broadcasters; Susan Herman, President, National Association of Telecommuniction Officers and Advisors; General Manager, LA Department of Telecommunications, Sharon Ingraham, Chair, NFLCP Board of Directors and partner in Brewster/Ingraham Consulting; and Karen Helmerson, guest editor-in-chief.

As Lynn Chadwick stated after the call, it was wonderful to drop out of the day-to-day fire fight to dream of things to come. Also it was clear that 90 minutes was just the beginning of the kind of cooperative planning that should take place between community media folk. In that vein, Lynn and I have taken it upon ourselves to organize a community media summit. In preparation we are inviting folks to discuss the list of participants and agenda items at both the NFCB conference in Boston in June and the NFLCP/NAMAC conferences in Portland Oregon in July. If you have any additional thoughts to add please call me at (616)459-4788.

—Dirk Koning, Executive Director, GRTV

Koning: What do you feel is currently the biggest threat to the future (and we're talking roughly 25 years) of community media?

Sharon: I think one of the biggest threats is a lack of comprehensive national policy for telecommunications that balances in an equitable way the needs of the public versus the needs of the private companies who are in business and who are developing the technologies.

Susan: I would concur. I think it's a lack of incentives from federal, state, and even local authorities to inspire and fund telecommunications' projects to have more community participation in telecommunications. I also think there is a lack of education to the public to let them know opportunities that are out there. How they can participate more in communications networks so they can actually create that global community we keep talking about.

Lynn: Marginalization in the community media, particularly the radio (and since I know most about that), if they don't resolve to really try to serve an audience as opposed to serve themselves then there's not going to be any resources to keep them going in the future. My sense is a lot of community media exists today because it was an idea that people should have access to the airwaves. But then we lost sight of who we're serving. I think that having lost that vision, if we don't focus on it and actualize it, that's going to be our threat to existence. We're just going to be marginalized out to the edges of the media.

Steve: I think it's a combination of two things. One is the issue of education, both public education about the resources that are available, and secondary education; teaching people communications' technology. Teaching them more about possibilities and alternatives to current media structures. A long term threat is increasing centralization of media control and a few corporate hands and technologies that are overly centralized, like direct broadcast television which eliminates the possibility for community origination of programming.

Susan: I concur that there is more and more a scheme toward federal regulation, particularly in the area of cable. It tends to remove from the community, local needs and interests to be served. If we are truly committed to meeting community needs and interests, there must be structures that foster and nurture community participation and give opportunities, both for development of programming and other applications of telecommunications at the local level, not at the remote federal level.

Koning: What is more critical in community media's future: public policy or emerging technology?

Steve: Well, I don't know that that's an either/ or question. We're not particularly active in the field of public policy. For Deep Dish, it's a scramble to try to figure out a way to utilize emerging technology to carry out the mission that we see. For us, and a lot of community media people, there's a bit of a lag time between technology becoming commercially viable and the time that we figure out a way to economically make use of it. I'm not sure that I would make a choice between trying to effect telecommunications policy and figuring out a way to keep abreast with new technologies. Though, I think you clearly have to do both and a lot of the struggle I think in public access has been both, has been keeping track of what the telephone company's doing, keeping track of what's happening with fiber optics and direct broadcast satellite. And at the same time, it's difficult to effect telecommunications policy without having a good understanding of what might be happening with the telecommunications hardware. And what affect long term economic trends are going to have on the way information is distributed, whether it's video or radio or computer data, or a combination of all of them, which I think is what's coming up with interactive video and increasing use of computers in media.

Lynn: Well, being a public policy person, not a technology person, the big issue has been local origination versus national satellite distribution, and the Communications Act has always, said local origination is what were all about here. However, now the FCC has been looking at the technology of satellite and saying, "Well gee, we have this way to do it nationally, why don't we just do it." What I think the technology is going to be for the next 25 years, in radio, the biggest thing that we're looking at is the change to digital audio. And what that's going to do for all of us in radio is to level the playing field. All signals will be equal, which could change our ability as small stations to compete in the market if our signal sounds just as good as another station that has many more watts. The Communications Act is going to have to be reevaluated. I think that that is going to be the major effort that will take a big chunk of time from Congress in a few years out and that's something that we in the broadcast business are going to have to worry about. I think that given our resources as community media, we're not going to be able to be leaders in the development of new technology, but were going to have to be smart about finding out how it can benefit us.

Susan: I concur with Steve in saying that we have to be keeping abreast of both the technological developments and how they influence policy. But in addition, certainly for public accessors, the additional challenge that with technologies like HDTV, the compatibility between the millions and millions of dollars in existing equipment we have, and what again our pictures will look like when HDTV comes about. If we have not developed the resources to have equipment that's compatible and that looks good, that's a tremendous challenge for access that could come up in the next ten years. It's a problem that we faced in the early days of access when the portable equipment didn't meet broadcast standards and that we certainly worked very

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hard to change, and it will become an additional challenge, particularly since the cost of equipment on HDTV will be expensive. For access, it's both looking at the delivery systems and then looking at the type of equipment, the quality of equipment that's being developed and making sure that we keep our communities well equipped.

Sharon: This one seems relatively simple for me and I probably deviate from some of my colleagues here. I believe that good old American ingenuity, as well as some foreign competition keeps technology rolling along and it's a very healthy industry or science if you will. To me, the most important thing is making sure that the technology does not push the user around. That in fact, what's most important in my view is insuring that there is good policy which promotes accessibility to technologies, which promotes economic access to, which promotes a real chance for democratizing, if you will, communications. I believe that the policy is really the thing that derives our uses and who is making use of it and how they're making use of it and so forth. To me, that is the most precious thing that we have to preserve over the next 25 years. The technology will continue to evolve. It's the uses and applications that help to create a telecommunications smart society. If there's an area that we've been lagging, I would say that it's in that area, not in technological development.

The whole issue is visual literacy and I assume, visual and technological literacy, on the part of ordinary citizens. It's a critical issue–creating in our children visual literacy and the sense that they should have access to the technology and that if we don't tackle these issues of visual literacy and technological competence on the part of individuals, we wont have people participating in access no matter how many facilities, equipment, or distribution systems we negotiate.

Karen: How has the community and audience we're now serving changed over the past 10 years?

Lynn: I think one of the great tools that were all going to have pretty soon is the release of June 1990 census data. It's going to show what this country looks like now, which is a lot different then what it looked like in 1980. One of the big challenges in community radio now is that we are getting more and more sophisticated audience data and trying to learn how to use it. Audience data and being interested in it doesn't mean by definition going after a big audience with pabulum programming. It does mean that we now can accurately measure whether the show we were producing for the Hispanic community is really being listened to by the Hispanic community. That's been an evolutionary thing, that we're now learning what can we do with audience measurement to make community media serve the communities it thinks it is serving or wants to serve or has the mission to serve. The awareness in community radio has always been around trying to reach out to the underserved. That was the whole purpose behind setting aside public channels in the FM band. Minority audiences for example have now become more aware of community radio and community media and have demanded their air time and have learned how to use the technology to produce their programs.

Koning: Who will the audiences will be in 10 years, and who is it today?

Susan: I'd like to go a little bit beyond just the traditional media of broadcast and talk about some of the telecommunications technologies in that regard. I think that the audience of a decade ago was more of a homogeneous type of population. I think that the new census, as well as just looking around our communities, tell us that we have a more multi-cultural, multi-lingual community out there. I think that, as a result, the programming and the applications in technologies that we're going to be seeing will be more multi-lingual and will be more multi-cultural. I thing it's going to be in two ways: 1. in terms of educating a general public about the diversity that's out there, and 2. I think it's going to be about individual communities being able to communicate with themselves. In other words, the Spanish speaking community being able to talk and communicate among themselves and be able to develop ideas and applications. We' re pulling together people in community radio, community television and community newspapers. I hope we can get to a point in 25 years where the technology that happens to be out there is just a tool for us to use for the work we' re doing. The technology changes continually. I hope were at a place where we can make better use of it. That's where the challenge is.

Lynn: I was thinking that my dream would be that you could go out and at random ask somebody on the street if they ever listen to their community radio or watch their community media and they'd say, "Yes." Name a show that they watch on a regular basis. And the show is something that we would all agree is a high community goal. I guess it's the awareness of the community that they would have. Centers would not be teetering on funding from year to year, but have a stable base and be able to reward their staff so that people view this as a career and young people grow up watching and say, "Gee, I'd like a job doing that one day," and can do it. That those staffs and the organizations represent the multi-cultural country that we will have then and we have now, but it' ll be even more so then.

Sharon: I think if I had to look at it from the individual's point of view that, for individuals in 25 years, if you have a message to get out whether you were an individual or a member of a group, that your means of getting it out is cheap and easy and easily accessible. That you can visit perhaps what some of us have talked about, the community media center and whether you want to produce an audio tape or send a fax or communicate by computer to many people, or do a television show that the resources are there and at your disposal and that we have developed technology to make it a snap to produce. That from a government and a community institution point of view and from non-profits that they continue to explore ways in which media can be used more and more to communicate and provide resources for communities like the multi-lingual government information which is still a limited case like bringing library services right to the home. And that in the future, we see more of that, not less of that. And in the hands of government and non-profits and people, not in the hands of multi-national corporations.

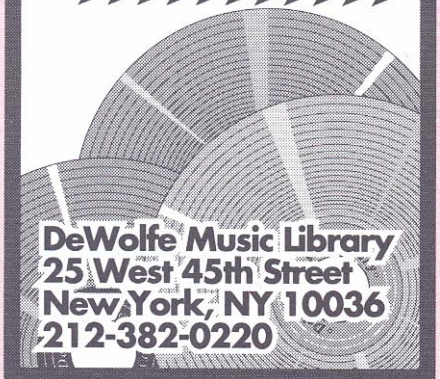
Susan: I guess what I would see is the cleanest, clearest signal yet. A signal that I could access at any place in my neighborhood or any place in the world, depending upon what my preference is. That my need to travel to either get or provide information would be limited. I would not have to travel at great distances. That I could limit a lot of access to information from my place of business or from my home or from my educational facility. And that, most importantly, this would leave me more time to play with my grand children, read and maybe as a result of using technologies as opposed to more conventional forms of transportation, be able to walk in cleaner, healthier air.

Koning: Well, this has been wonderful everybody. I wish we could have more time to do this more often. I hope it's the beginning, frankly, of a continuing discussion and I would love to see some kind of a summit once a year of media access folks, because there's a whole world of computer activists out there who have some hot networks going, transfering information and as all the technologies are merged more and more, the distinctions we've established over the years are being flittered away. If we can pull some of those folks in too, I think we're all going to be much better off.

I want to thank everybody for their time and interest. Good day. ■

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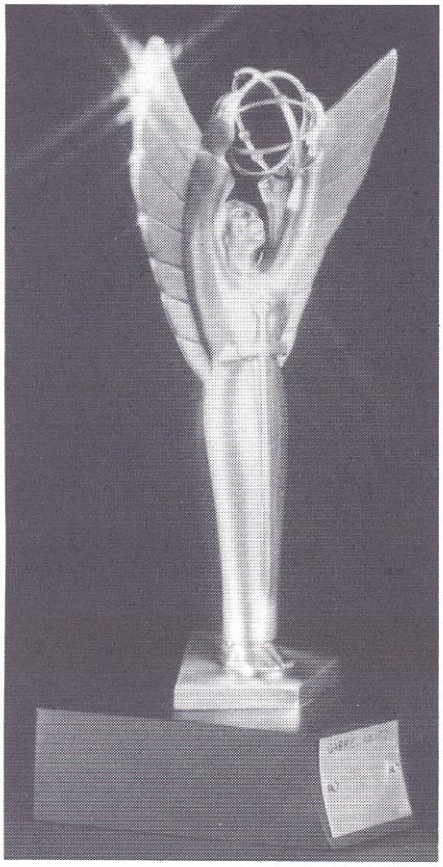
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